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## ABSTRACT

Interviews with 900 people provided data about the impact of cable television on public television viewing. The subjects came from three matched samples, each containing 300 homes drawn from the same geographic area of Salt Lake City, Utah, differing primarily in their subscription/access to cable television (homes with cable television, homes with access to cable lines but not connected to the cable system, and homes immediately beyond the coverage pattern of the cable system). Although the interview responses suggested that cable viewers perceive their viewing to be different from that of noncable viewers, actual viewership and knowledge of programs failed to reveal any significant differences. If anything, the cable viewers watched slightly more public television than comparable households without cable. Awareness of existing public television offerings and identified program preferences were relatively uniform across all three samples. These results indicate that the effect of cable television on the composition and viewing patterns of public television audiences is negligible. (RL)

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THE EFFECT OF CATV ON THE COMPOSITION AND  
VIEWING PATTERNS OF PUBLIC TELEVISION AUDIENCES

by

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### Introduction

During the past decade, few topics in the field of telecommunications have received the kind of sustained attention that has been directed toward cable communications. Task forces in both the public and private sectors have analyzed and reanalyzed the potential impact of community antenna television, CATV, or broadband communications in its various phases of development. From fragmenting the profits of commercial television and radio to the promise of home banking and data retrieval, the advent of cable communications has been viewed as both a villain and a miraculous genie.

Yet, with all the fanfare which has accompanied cable's short history, few scholars have considered the possible effects of CATV on noncommercial telecommunications. Two publications produced by the Aspen Program on Communications and Society, coupled with reports commissioned by the Rand Corporation, suggest that CATV could have a profound impact on all educational delivery systems. These predictions have been based largely upon generalizations drawn from the commercial media and the potential implications of telecommunications technology already available. Clear empirical evidence remains rather scarce. This study attempted to provide a systematic approach to determining the actual impact of cable communications on selected public television variables. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to determine the effect of CATV on awareness, perceptions, and viewing patterns of public television audiences.

### Methodology

The research design employed 900 in-person interviews in Salt Lake

City, Utah. A total of three matched samples of 300 television homes were utilized:

- (1) Cable Television Homes (SCBL)
- (2) Non-Cable Television Homes with Access (SWAC)
- (3) Non-Cable Television Homes without Access (SWOT)

Total N = 900

(Abbreviations shown are used as sample names, and as column headings on all data tables.)

The three matched samples of Salt Lake City television homes were drawn from the same geographical section of the community. Specifically, Samples 1 and 2 were drawn from the city blocks within the boundaries of 9th and 33rd South, 13th and 21st East. Sample 3 was drawn from the adjacent area of 9th and 33rd South, 9th and 13th East. The subscription criterion for Cable Television Homes was six months, since previous research suggests that this period provides sufficient time for viewing patterns to stabilize. Non-Cable Television Homes with Access were defined as those homes with access to cable lines but are not connected to the cable system. Non-Cable Television Homes without Access were defined as those homes immediately beyond the coverage pattern of the cable system. Both samples of noncable television homes also met a six-month residency criterion.

In order to assure that the Salt Lake City samples were properly matched, the Cable sample (SCBL) was randomly drawn from computer lists of cable subscribers. The Non-Cable with Access sample (SWAC) was

drawn in the field, from the identical neighborhoods where the Cable sample was identified. The Non-Cable without Access sample (SWOT) was randomly drawn from a 1977 Polk Street Directory for the pre-determined sampling area. This sample served as a baseline for the Salt Lake City market.

#### The Research Instrument

The questionnaire designed for this study employed a format similar to previous in-depth instruments which have sought awareness, viewership, and program preference data. In addition, questions regarding program evaluation (i.e., TVQ format), and demographic and media inventories were also posed. A member of the research team visited each home in person, and interviewed the female or male head of the household. Each interview required approximately 25 minutes for completion, and an attempt was made to maintain a balance between male and female respondents.

#### Results and Discussion

Each interview was initiated by asking the respondent to identify the number of working television sets in the home. This inquiry served as a criterion measure for terminating the interview in cases where no television set existed. It also served as a vehicle for beginning the interview in a nonthreatening manner, and for permitting the respondent to provide information which was readily known.

The only significant finding to be derived from this initial inquiry was the variance in color penetration across the three samples. As illustrated

in Table 1, color penetration was greater in SCBL (87.6%) than in either SWAC (72.3%) or SWOT (75.7). Consistent with previous research, there appears to be a positive correlation between reception of cable services and the presence of one or more color television sets in the home. Roughly twice as many SWAC (27.7%) and SWOT (24.3%) homes have black and white television only, compared with SCBL (12.3%) homes.

Unlike radio, which enjoys strong listener loyalties, television viewers tend to identify with specific programs rather than individual stations. However, since avid public television viewers tend to express their appreciation for noncommercial fare without prompting, respondents were asked to identify the television channel viewed most frequently in their home. Although previous research conducted by CPB would suggest that PTV viewership can frequently be regarded as "additional" television exposure rather than an "alternative" to commercial fare, it was reasoned that viewers who identified a PTV station without prompting as the channel used most often would exhibit a high degree of knowledge about public television.

With regard to the actual number of respondents who identified a local PTV channel (KUED or KBYU) as the most frequently viewed channel in their homes, the three Salt Lake samples afforded significant differences. The highest number of mentions was provided by SWOT (25%), followed by SWAC (14%) and SCBL (10.7%). In other words, respondents in the non-cable-non access sample mentioned PTV as the most frequently viewed channel in their homes significantly more often than either the noncable-

TABLE 1

COLOR SET PENETRATION IN SALT LAKE SAMPLES

|             | SCBL         | SWAC         | SWOT         |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 0           | 37<br>12.3%  | 83<br>27.7%  | 73<br>24.3%  |
| 1           | 187<br>62.3% | 171<br>57.0% | 186<br>62.0% |
| 2           | 64<br>21.3%  | 42<br>14.0%  | 29<br>9.7%   |
| 3           | 10<br>3.3%   | 4<br>1.3%    | 11<br>3.7%   |
| 4           | 2<br>0.7%    | 0<br>0.0%    | 1<br>0.3%    |
| Total Color | 87.6%        | 72.3%        | 75.7%        |

with access or cable samples. Even more striking was the preference voiced for the ABC station in contrast with CBS and NBC. SWOT mentioned ABC as the most frequently watched channel more than twice as often as either SCBL or SWAC. If a high correlation exists between the channel cited as the one watched most frequently and actual viewing, these findings would certainly lead to the early conclusion that the viewing patterns of SWOT reflect the greatest use of public television. Results from other viewership and program knowledge questions fail to support this claim.

Perhaps the most viable statement which can be drawn from this data set concerns the SCBL and SWAC samples. Given identical neighborhoods, additional independent and local origination channels provided through cable tend to lower the number of mentions for both local PTV and commercial channels. It is also interesting to note that significantly more SCBL respondents had "no opinion" regarding this question than the noncable respondents. While the SWOT data are difficult to explain, the SCBL and SWAC answers to this question suggest that the presence of cable has at least some influence on respondents' perceptions of which television channels are watched most frequently in their homes (Table 2).

When asked if there were any "public (educational) television stations in this area," responses across the SCBL and SWAC samples were virtually identical. Table 3 indicates that 93.3% of both the SCBL and SWAC respondents could identify KUED and/or KBYU without any assistance from the interviewer. The identification level for the SWOT sample was slightly lower (86.7%). (These figures are well above the national averages reported

TABLE 2

CHANNEL IDENTIFIED AS "MOST WATCHED"  
IN SALT LAKE CITY

|                          | SCBL        | SWAC        | SWOT         |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| KUED (PTV <sub>1</sub> ) | 29<br>9.7%  | 37<br>12.3% | 66<br>22.0%  |
| KBYU (PTV <sub>2</sub> ) | 3<br>1.0%   | 5<br>1.7%   | 9<br>3.0%    |
| ABC                      | 58<br>19.3% | 61<br>20.3% | 126<br>42.0% |
| CBS                      | 66<br>22.0% | 87<br>29.0% | 45<br>15.0%  |
| NBC                      | 87<br>29.0% | 98<br>32.7% | 43<br>14.3%  |
| Independ/<br>Local Org   | 32<br>10.7% | --          | --           |
| No Opinion               | 25<br>8.3%  | 12<br>4.0%  | 11<br>3.7%   |

TABLE 3

AWARENESS OF PTV IN SALT LAKE CITY MARKET

|                           | SCBL         | SWAC         | SWOT         |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Unaided<br>Identification | 280<br>93.3% | 280<br>93.3% | 260<br>86.7% |
| Aided<br>Identification   | 13<br>4.3%   | 15<br>5.0%   | 32<br>10.7%  |
| No<br>Identification      | 7<br>2.3%    | 5<br>1.7%    | 8<br>2.7%    |

in the CPB-commissioned study by Statistical Research, Inc. , in May of 1977.) When prompted responses are added to the unaided answers, a total of 97.6% of SCBL, 98.6% of SWAC, and 97.4% of SWOT respondents could identify the presence of a public television station in the Salt Lake City market.

Reception of local television signals throughout most of the Salt Lake valley is exceptionally good, even without an external antenna. This is due to the high elevation of transmission towers on Mount Vision and Farnsworth Peak in the Oquirrh Mountain Range, and the relatively flat valley floor, characteristic of the three sampling districts. Thus, it was expected that a large majority of respondents across all three samples would regard their PTV reception to be either excellent or good: SCBL (94.8%), SWAC (90.1%), SWOT (86.7%). Virtually none of the respondents regarded PTV reception quality to be poor. In addition, there was no significant difference between the perceived quality of PTV and KSL (CBS), which was used for purposes of comparison. Hence, the quality of public television reception was not a significant variable in this study.

#### Public Television Viewership

The affirmative response rate to the question, "Have you ever watched any program on Utah's public television stations?", was nearly identical across all three samples: SCBL (88.5%), SWAC (85.7%), SWOT (88.2%). Although the percentage of "yes" responses was slightly lower in the SWAC sample, the near equal response rate generated by the SCBL and SWOT

samples suggest that the minor variance can be attributed to chance, rather than any cable effect.

When respondents were asked to present a profile of (1) who watches PTV in the household, and (2) who watches PTV the most, the data reported were again highly similar for all Salt Lake City samples. If the responses are to be accepted at face value, they lead to the strong conclusion that the adult household members account for the majority of PTV viewership in all sampling districts. Virtually none of the respondents identified children as the sole PTV viewers in the household. This was the case for age ranges 2-5, 6-11, and 12-18. Whether the responses represent an accurate depiction of family viewing habits is unknown. Since the respondent, whether male or female, frequently identified himself/herself as the most avid PTV viewer in the household, the results would appear biased in the direction of adult viewership. Clearly a limitation of the present study was the inability to verify the accuracy of responses, and to reduce the respondents' desires to be identified with public (educational) television.

Tables 4 and 5 illustrate the heavy concentration of adult viewership as reported by all respondents. PTV viewing profiles for SCBL, SWAC and SWOT reveal the dominance of adult viewers, whether alone or in combination with other family members. This was also true of responses to the question of who watches PTV most often. Although there appears to be differences between the three samples, none of the comparisons was statistically significant at the .05 level. Recognizing that there are obvious

TABLE 4

HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS WHO WATCH PTV

|                          | SCBL         | SWAC         | SWOT         |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Adults                   | 148<br>60.7% | 153<br>61.4% | 175<br>70.0% |
| Children 6-18            | 1<br>0.4%    | 1<br>0.4%    | 2<br>0.8%    |
| Children 2-5             | 0<br>0.0%    | 3<br>1.2%    | 1<br>0.4%    |
| Adults/<br>Children 6-18 | 59<br>24.2%  | 44<br>17.7%  | 33<br>13.2%  |
| Adults/<br>Children 2-5  | 17<br>7.0%   | 28<br>11.2%  | 22<br>8.8%   |
| Adults/2-5/6-18          | 19<br>7.8%   | 20<br>8.0%   | 17<br>6.8%   |
| N =                      | 244          | 249          | 250          |

TABLE 5

HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS WHO WATCH PTV THE MOST

|               | SCBL         | SWAC         | SWOT         |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Adults        | 199<br>77.4% | 199<br>78.3% | 204<br>80.0% |
| Children 6-18 | 34<br>13.2%  | 32<br>12.6%  | 32<br>12.5%  |
| Children 2-5  | 24<br>9.3%   | 23<br>9.1%   | 19<br>7.5%   |
| N =           | 257          | 254          | 255          |

distortions in the information provided by the respondents, these data are consistent across all three samples.

From the offset, one of the concerns associated with this study was that data collection was scheduled during the summer vacation period. It was assumed that television viewership would be generally lower, but that PTV viewership might be positively influenced by commercial television re-runs and summer replacements. To combat the atypical summer viewing patterns, respondents were encouraged to also think about their own viewing in terms of the other seasons of the year. Then, within this cognitive framework, each respondent was asked to estimate the number of hours spent watching PTV during a typical weekday period (Monday-Friday), and during a typical weekend. These two responses were followed by a request for the number of hours the respondent had spent watching PTV during the last seven days.

Looking first at weekday PTV viewing, Table 6 reports a significant difference between the three Salt Lake City samples. PTV viewing was significantly higher for SCBL and SWAC, with a larger percentage of SWOT respondents stating that they watched public television less than one hour during the typical weekday period. Moderate weekday viewing was comparable across all three samples, but a somewhat larger proportion of SCBL respondents claimed that they normally view PTV four hours or more during the five weekdays. This higher incidence of heavy PTV viewing for SCBL was not statistically significant.

REPORTED VIEWING OF PTV DURING  
TYPICAL WEEKDAY PERIOD

|                    | SCBL        | SWAC        | SWOT        |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| None               | 13<br>5.1%  | 24<br>9.4%  | 15<br>5.9%  |
| Less than<br>1 hr. | 58<br>22.6% | 44<br>17.3% | 93<br>36.3% |
| 1 - 2 hrs.         | 52<br>20.0% | 57<br>22.4% | 32<br>12.5% |
| 2 - 3 hrs.         | 72<br>28.0% | 79<br>31.0% | 70<br>27.3% |
| 4 hrs.<br>or more  | 62<br>24.1% | 51<br>20.0% | 46<br>18.0% |
| N =                | 257         | 255         | 256         |

Turning to weekend viewing, none of the PTV viewing levels reported by the three samples was significantly different, although Table 7 suggests that a larger percentage of heavy PTV viewers are found within SCBL. These figures are consistent with the weekday findings, though weekend PTV viewership is sharply lower in all categories. The number of respondents reporting moderate or heavy PTV viewing on weekends is less than half that of those making similar claims for weekday viewing.

The data for PTV viewing during the previous seven days reveal several interesting comparisons (Table 8). A significantly larger percentage of SWOT respondents reported no PTV viewing during this period than did either SCBL or SWAC, and a significantly higher percentage of SCBL respondents set their viewing at two hours or more. By contrast, a larger number of SWAC respondents claimed to have watched PTV from one to two hours. When the data are collapsed across the moderate and heavy categories (1 to 2 + 2 to 3 + 4 or more), the advantage for the SCBL sample disappears.

Following the advice of other public television researchers, respondents who claimed to have watched PTV during the previous seven-day period were asked to identify a specific program which had been viewed in the home. The results of this inquiry add support to the earlier response. Approximately 95% of all respondents who stated that they had watched public television during the last seven days could correctly identify a PTV program (Table 9). Overall, 50.7% of SCBL, 47.6% of SWAC, and 41.3% of SWOT respondents (N=300), could verify their knowledge of a specific

TABLE 7

REPORTED VIEWING OF PTV DURING TYPICAL WEEKEND

|                    | SCBL        | SWAC        | SWOT        |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| None               | 77<br>29.8% | 83<br>32.5% | 82<br>32.0% |
| Less than<br>1 hr. | 58<br>22.5% | 63<br>24.7% | 72<br>28.1% |
| 1-2 hrs.           | 56<br>21.7% | 54<br>21.2% | 56<br>21.9% |
| 2-3 hrs.           | 36<br>14.0% | 35<br>13.7% | 30<br>11.7% |
| 4 hrs.<br>or more  | 31<br>12.0% | 20<br>7.8%  | 16<br>6.3%  |
| N =                | 258         | 255         | 256         |

TABLE 8

REPORTED VIEWING OF PTV DURING LAST SEVEN DAYS

|                    | SCBL         | SWAC         | SWOT         |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| None               | 98<br>38.3%  | 105<br>41.3% | 125<br>48.8% |
| Less than<br>1 hr. | 22<br>8.6%   | 22<br>8.7%   | 17<br>6.6%   |
| 1-2 hrs.           | 48<br>18.8%  | 71<br>28.0%  | 47<br>18.4%  |
| 2-3 hrs.           | 43<br>16.87% | 26<br>10.2%  | 31<br>12.1%  |
| 4 hrs.<br>or more  | 45<br>17.6%  | 30<br>11.8%  | 36<br>14.1%  |
| N =                | 256          | 254          | 256          |

TABLE 9  
PTV VIEWERS WHO COULD NAME PROGRAM

|                      | SCBL | SWAC | SWOT |
|----------------------|------|------|------|
| % of Last<br>7 Days  | 96.2 | 95.9 | 94.7 |
| % of Total<br>Sample | 50.7 | 47.6 | 41.3 |

PTV program aired during the previous seven days. It should be noted, however, that while these figures lend credence to other viewership responses, they are probably somewhat inflated for at least two reasons. First, credit was given for appropriate descriptions of PTV programs even though the respondent could not recall the exact program title. Such descriptors, e.g. "the gardening program," "symphony orchestra program," and "discussion show about cost of living and inflation," could, by chance, identify one or more programs aired during any seven-day period. These responses accounted for 22.4% of all credited answers. Secondly, programs frequently mentioned, though aired during the previous week, could have been recalled from earlier viewing. But even with these limitations, the proportion of past-week viewers who could identify a PTV program is certainly well above national estimates reported in previous research (SRI, 1977).

Summarizing the results derived from all three measures of PTV viewing -- weekday, weekend, and last seven days -- one can conclude that there is somewhat more PTV viewing reported by SCBL than SWAC respondents, though the difference does not appear significant. Both the SCBL and SWAC samples indicate significantly higher levels of PTV viewership than do the SWOT respondents. Thus, while these indicators demonstrate PTV viewing differences between the Salt Lake City samples, the observed variance seems to be the product of variables other than cable subscription.

### Satisfaction with Public Television

Respondents from all three samples revealed general satisfaction with the quality of public television programming. Table 10 indicates that the level of satisfaction for the SCBL and SWAC samples is virtually identical. The SWOT respondents were somewhat less satisfied, a finding consistent with their lower level of reported viewership. However, none of the differences between the three samples was statistically significant. Nearly 90% of all Salt Lake City respondents stated that they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the program services afforded by KUED and/or KBYU. Once again, this percentage is higher than the national average reported by Statistical Research, Inc., in their 1977 report.

When given the opportunity to suggest types of programs they would enjoy seeing more of on public television, respondents were relatively consistent in their recommendations across all three samples. Without question, the strongest preference was for more serious music and dramatic programs. Table 11 reveals that more than one-third of all respondents who made a specific recommendation identified music and/or drama as the areas requiring more broadcast time. Similarly, all three samples expressed an interest in more documentary-type programs which not only focused on contemporary issues, but provided an historical perspective as well.

An analysis of the program types by each sample failed to yield any consistent patterns which might be attributed to cable viewing. Movie classics were cited most often by the SCBL and SWOT respondents, where-

TABLE 10

REPORTED SATISFACTION WITH PTV

|                | SCBL         | SWAC         | SWOT         |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Not Satisfied  | 25<br>9.9%   | 25<br>10.2%  | 31<br>12.4%  |
| Satisfied      | 163<br>64.4% | 162<br>66.1% | 176<br>70.1% |
| Very Satisfied | 65<br>25.7%  | 58<br>23.7%  | 44<br>17.5%  |
| N =            | 253          | 245          | 251          |

TABLE 11

DESIRED INCREASE IN PTV PROGRAM TYPE

|                        | SCBL        | SWAC        | SWOT        |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Documentary/Historical | 48<br>24.1% | 36<br>19.1% | 44<br>21.4% |
| Travelogues            | 0<br>0.0%   | 2<br>1.1%   | 5<br>2.4%   |
| Educational/Childrens  | 22<br>11.1% | 17<br>9.0%  | 35<br>17.0% |
| Serious Music/Drama    | 74<br>37.2% | 85<br>45.2% | 62<br>30.1% |
| Movie Classics         | 18<br>9.0%  | 8<br>4.3%   | 20<br>9.7%  |
| Science/Nature         | 19<br>9.5%  | 16<br>8.5%  | 18<br>8.7%  |
| Sports                 | 12<br>6.0%  | 7<br>3.7%   | 5<br>2.4%   |
| News/Discussion        | 6<br>3.0%   | 17<br>9.0%  | 17<br>8.3%  |
| N =                    | 199         | 188         | 206         |

as a larger preference for more news programs was found in the SWAC and SWOT samples. Given that the cable homes already have access to more sports programming than either noncable sample, it was somewhat surprising that roughly twice as many SCBL respondents expressed an interest for more sports programs on public television. The SWOT respondents desired more travelogues and educational/childrens programs than did either the SCBL or SWAC samples. Consistent with the lower level of satisfaction expressed by SWOT viewers, more respondents from this sample contributed specific program recommendations.

When respondents were asked whether or not they could recall discussing a public television program with a friend, nearly three-fourths of them answered affirmatively. Responses for the three Salt Lake City samples are summarized in Table 12, and the similarity is striking. This is also true of the specific programs identified by the respondents. For all three samples, the most frequently cited program was "Masterpiece Theatre," with "Nova" mentioned as a distant second. No other program title received as many as ten mentions in any sample. It is also interesting to note that although "Evening at Pops" and "In Performance at Wolftrap" were frequently cited by respondents as favorite programs, they were seldom identified as programs which were discussed with others. It might be concluded, therefore, that programs which have a dramatic or contemporary subject orientation have a greater probability of stimulating viewers to engage in discussions with friends than do musical formats.

TABLE 12

DISCUSS PTV PROGRAMS WITH FRIENDS

|     | SCBL         | SWAC         | SWOT         |
|-----|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| No  | 71<br>27.5%  | 74<br>29.2%  | 76<br>29.7%  |
| Yes | 187<br>72.5% | 179<br>70.8% | 180<br>70.3% |
| N = | 258          | 253          | 256          |

### Television Program Preferences

To determine whether CATV produced a systematic effect on viewers' evaluations of both commercial and public television programs, respondents were asked to rate a total of thirty programs. Of the thirty, sixteen were programs aired on one of the three commercial networks, and fourteen were programs distributed by PBS. The public television programs were selected in consultation with CPB's Office of Communication Research, and were matched with a number of "comparable" programs from the commercial schedules. The remaining commercial programs were of the popular entertainment type, and were included to help disguise the large proportion of public television offerings. Respondents utilized a rating scale of 1 to 6, with the following evaluations: 1 = one of the best; 2 = very good; 3 = good; 4 = fair; 5 = poor; and 6 = no knowledge of the program.

An 18-cell matrix (3 x 6) was generated for each program title using the six scales and the three samples. Then, using a Chi square test of expected cell frequencies, the program preferences of respondents were compared across samples. Of the thirty programs analyzed in this manner, only six resulted in  $X^2$  values which were significant at or beyond the .05 level. Of the six, four were commercial ("ABC News Close Up," "Carol Burnett Show," "Charlie's Angels," and "Kojak"), and two were public television ("Electric Company," and "Great Performances"). Careful examination of the six matrices failed to reveal any consistent patterns which would support an explanation based on the research variables. The

most plausible explanation in all cases is that chance fluctuations between adjacent ratings (e.g. "very good" and "good") are responsible for the differences reported.

If one accepts this explanation, the three samples can be combined in order to create a composite rating for each of the thirty programs. Assuming further that a summation of the "one of the best" and "very good" ratings provides a clear reflection of the respondents' program preferences, a rating "score" and corresponding program ranking can be computed. This score was defined as the average (mean) percentage of all respondents (SCBL, SWAC, SWOT) who rated the program 1 or 2. Using this approach, the television program preferences for the 900 Salt Lake City respondents are summarized in Table 13.

Clearly, the commercial program, "60 Minutes," was the most popular of the thirty programs included in the survey, and "Monster Squad" was judged the least popular. As expected, the public television programs which received the highest evaluations were "Sesame Street" and "Masterpiece Theatre." The lowest ranked PTV show was "Age of Uncertainty," which generated the largest percentage of "no knowledge" responses (88.8%). In general, there was a high positive correlation between respondent's evaluations of a PTV program and its "knowledge index." Of the top fifteen programs, eight were public television offerings. Of those eight, five were adult and three were children's programs, with "Zoom" being the only children's PTV show not to be included in the first fifteen programs.

TABLE 13

## TELEVISION PROGRAM PREFERENCES ACROSS ALL SALT LAKE CITY SAMPLES

| Rank | Score | Title                     | Rank | Score | Title                       |
|------|-------|---------------------------|------|-------|-----------------------------|
| 1    | 77    | 60 Minutes                | 15.5 | 19    | Nova                        |
| 2    | 53    | Wonderful World of Disney | 17   | 18    | Documentary Showcase        |
| 3    | 49    | Hallmark Hall of Fame     | 18   | 17    | Charlie's Angels            |
| 4    | 48    | Sesame Street             | 19   | 16    | Kojak                       |
| 5    | 45    | Masterpiece Theatre       | 20   | 15    | Ten Who Dared               |
| 6    | 37    | Meet the Press            | 21.5 | 14    | Six Million Dollar Man      |
| 7    | 30    | Carol Burnett Show        | 21.5 | 14    | Zoom                        |
| 8    | 29    | ABC News Close-Up         | 23   | 12    | In Performance at Wolf Trap |
| 9    | 27    | Electric Company          | 24.5 | 11    | Captain Kangaroo            |
| 10   | 26    | Lowell Thomas Remembers   | 24.5 | 11    | Midnight Special            |
| 11   | 25    | Misterogers Neighborhood  | 26   | 10    | Wall Street Week            |
| 12   | 24    | Great Performances        | 27   | 9     | Mickey Mouse Club           |
| 13   | 23    | Who's Who                 | 28   | 5     | Age of Uncertainty          |
| 14   | 20    | MacNeil/Lehrer Report     | 29   | 4     | Shazam/Isis Hour            |
| 15.5 | 19    | Consumer Survival Kit     | 30   | 1     | Monster Squad               |

At first glance, then, one might conclude that public television programs enjoy a fairly high status among the general public. However, there are at least two factors which should be considered when interpreting these results. First, the type of rating scales employed in this study tend to encourage respondents to drift toward the middle values of "good" and "fair." Hence, a relatively small proportion of avid PTV viewers could skew the results in a positive direction through an extensive use of the "one of the best" and "very good" scales. Secondly, the research team was repeatedly left with the impression that judgments were frequently made on the basis of what was perceived as a socially acceptable response, rather than an accurate reflection of one's personal preference. Evidence in support of this concern can be found by a close examination of those titles identified as the "best" programs. Of those commercial offerings included in the top ten programs, only "60 Minutes" and perhaps "Wonderful World of Disney" enjoy high enough audience ratings to support the evaluations recorded by the respondents. "Hallmark Hall of Fame" remains as one of the most highly acclaimed, award-winning programs in American television history, but it has not been a regularly scheduled program for several years. Similarly, "Meet the Press" and "ABC News Close-Up" are not regarded as top rated programs on commercial television, yet the survey respondents ranked these shows much more highly than the popular "Charlie's Angels," "Kojak," and "Six Million Dollar Man."

It can be argued that the research instrument used in this study was designed to elicit honest evaluations of television programs rather than to

substantiate A. C. Nielsen or Arbitron findings. Given this contention, the present results would lend credence to the position that both viewers and non-viewers of public television judge the PBS offerings to be among the best programs available. However, this awareness of "quality programming" bears very little resemblance to actual viewing habits. Recalling the findings of Gary Steiner (The People Look at Television, 1963) and Robert Bower (Television and the Public, 1973), the present study contributes additional evidence in support of the widely discussed claim that the American viewing audience is well aware of what is "good for them," but that they simply choose to watch programs with a higher entertainment value. In any event, there is nothing in the findings derived from this portion of the study to suggest that CATV has any impact in shaping the commercial or public television program preferences of viewers.

### Conclusions

As stated in the introduction of this paper, advocates and critics of CATV have argued repeatedly about the possible impact of subscription television services on existing commercial and public television viewership. Despite all of the heated rhetoric, it was not until recently that researchers began to mount a series of systematic investigations to assess the influence of cable television.

Within the limitations of this study, the results lead to the inescapable conclusion that the effect of CATV, either positive or negative, on the composition and viewing patterns of public television audiences is negligible. Although responses to initial questions suggest that cable viewers perceive

their viewing to be different from noncable viewers, actual viewership and knowledge of programs fail to reveal any differences which cannot be attributed to chance or situation variables within the three sample groups. In other words, cable viewers claim much greater fractionalization of station viewing (in terms of what they feel are the most frequently viewed channels in the home) than are suggested by actual hours spent viewing PTV. If anything, Salt Lake cable viewers watch slightly more local public television than comparable households without cable. Yet, this higher margin of reported viewership did not produce a higher knowledge level for PTV programs. Awareness of existing public television offerings and identified program preferences were relatively uniform across all three samples.

Thus, if the fears of CATV critics are to be supported by research evidence, an approach different from the one employed in the present study will be needed.

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